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SOURCE Newspapers as indicated.

CRITICIZE DEFICIENCIES OF RETAIL TRADE IN THE USSR

While stressing general improvement of Soviet retail trade in the last 3 months of 1949, Soviet newspapers frequently carry letters and articles criticizing trade organizations and retail outlets. Criticism ranges from poor organization of trade to actual fraud and criminal violation of trade laws. The most common criticisms are: (1) stores maintain an inadequate variety of goods; (2) goods are distributed mechanically without much consideration for the requirements of consumers; (3) warehouses and distribution bases are overstocked with goods for which there is no current demand; and (4) customers are frequently cheated and defrauded.

Leninskoye Znamye reports from the Karelo-Finnish SSR that the majority of trading organizations of Medvezh'yegorsk rayon do not carry an adequate selection of goods. The paper states that in the rural store of the Kumsin agricultural consumer cooperative, 72 of the required minimum of 166 items are not on sale even though 44 of the missing goods were available in the warehouse of the regional consumer cooperative. The unavailable items include phonographs, ink, penholders, buttons, glasses, etc. A similar situation exists in the shops of the Lumbush agricultural consumer cooperative, the paper goes on. (1)

Trud complains of the limited varieties of food products in public eating places and food stores, and states that Shop No 89 of the Yaroslav food-trading organization has no macaroni, caramel and pastry and only two brands of sausage are on sale instead of the required eight. (2) An article in Moskovskiy Bol'shevik accuses the directors of the City (Moscow) Administration of Industrial Cooperatives of not being concerned over the shortages of inexpensive vacuum cleaners, electric refrigerators, gas-electric washing machines, vats with attachments for boiling laundry, potato peelers, and vegetable-cutting devices. The article blames these shortages on the lack of initiative, inefficient utilization of waste products, and failure to make use of the resources of collective farm villages. (3)

Sovetskaya Latvija states that in many stores the required varieties of food and industrial products were not available, in spite of the fact that such goods were stored in the warehouses of trading organizations. (4)

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Much of the criticism which appears in Soviet newspapers is directed against "the archaic methods of mechanical distribution of goods" (5) and "the allotment of goods without regard to the demand of the population". (1) Sovetskaya Kirgiziya blames the Ministry of Trade of the Kirgiz SSR for failure to fulfill the plan of commodity distribution and "to meet the changing conditions of wider and more diverse demands and tastes." The article goes on to say, "It is impossible to purchase potatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, and fruit in Frunze, even though the capital is surrounded by gardens and orchards. The difficulty lies in the failure of the city trade organizations to make adequate arrangements for the transportation of goods. This example of faulty management is far from being an exception. There are numerous instances of an excess of goods in one store and a paucity of goods in another. It is extremely difficult to purchase a man's suit in Kochkorka, while in Frunze there is a superfluity of men's suits." (5)

Izvestiya gives another example of the maldistribution of goods by the Main Administration of Department Stores of the Ministry of Trade USSR, which continued to ship sewing machines, bicycles, motorcycles, and electrical goods to the Grozny department store in spite of the fact that the latter already had an overstock of these goods. When the director of the department store refused to pay for any further shipments of bicycles from the Kharkov Bicycle Plant because the store already had more than 600,000 rubles' worth of bicycles in its warehouses, he was forced to pay for these goods by the Main Administration. After this, the director was reluctant "to contradict the authorities" and for three quarters of the current year unneeded bicycles and motorcycles to the value of 450,000 rubles were shipped to this store. The Main Administration also shipped 660,000 rubles' worth of sewing machines to Grozny in spite of the fact that the store already had a stock of sewing machines worth 325,000 rubles. Electrical goods, radio sets, tea urns, and clocks were also delivered to Grozny without any request for these goods and in spite of categorical protests by the manager of the department store. As a result of this forced accumulation, the warehouses of the Grozny department store were stocked with commodities amounting to 3 million rubles. To get rid of the surplus the department store had to find buyers in other cities. "Such inefficiency," states the article, "leads to wasteful use of transportation facilities and unnecessary expenditures," and concludes that "all this is the result of mechanical planning by the Main Administration of Department Stores." (6)

Moskovskiy Bol'shevik reports that many commodity bares have assumed the attitude of "take what is given you" and are not much concerned with obtaining a wide selection of consumer goods on time. Thus, the Noginsk department store did not receive uniform dresses for school girls until after the school year started and the Orekhovo-Zuyevo department store No 13 had no woolen sweaters or ski suits in November, while it received a shipment of summer T-shirts in October. The need for improving the quality of consumer goods was also mentioned. Some children's sweaters were so poorly made that they could not be sold and eventually had to be returned to the factory. (7)

Sovetskaya Latvija criticizes the Ministry of Trade Latvian SSR for not fulfilling the plan of commodity turnover for the first three quarters of 1949 and for opening only 11 of the 25 specialized stores scheduled for opening. The paper also reports that in the specialized stores of ready-made clothing and footwear in Daugavpils, Elgava, Ventspils, there were no fitting rooms, mirrors and other pieces of equipment. In a majority of shops which trade in perishable products and also in public feeding enterprises there are no refrigeration facilities. Sovetskaya Latvija went on to say that trading organizations of the republic which did obtain refrigeration equipment do not use it to its full capacity. (4)

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Another common criticism is directed against overstocking warehouses and bases with surplus goods. One article points out that in Leningrad Oblast bases and warehouses are filled with tens of millions of rubles' worth of unsalable products. On the other hand, it reports, there is a shortage of mass consumption goods, and such items as axes, milk pails, infants' baths, and shaving brushes are not produced at all by the Leningrad Oblast Administration of Industrial Co-operatives. The article goes on to explain that the Oblast Timber Industrial Cooperative Union has not yet started mass production of skis and ski poles despite the availability of all the facilities to do so. (8) Another article in the Moskovskiy Bol'shevik blames the overstocking of warehouses with useless and unwanted goods on red tape and bureaucracy. (3)

Serious criticism is also directed against cheating of customers in some shops. The newspaper Zarya Vostoka published several letters to the editor which cited serious violations of trade laws and reported cases of fraud and shortchanging of customers in Tbilisi. One letter claims that almost every customer is being cheated on the weight of bread at Shop No 3 of the Sakpur Trust. Another letter in the same newspaper reports that the price of sugar was increased in a shop of the Tbilisi food trust. Other complaints tell of defrauding customers in Shop No 1 of the meat combine and in Shop No 9 of the Georgian branch of "Gastronom." Still another reader complains that little attention is paid to government prices for commodities, that customers are cheated and shortchanged, and that other Soviet trade laws are violated. (9)

Similar criticism is voiced in a letter written to a Moscow paper by K. Chumakova, Deputy of the Dzerzhinsk Rayon Soviet of Moscow. This letter complains that in Shop No 44 of the Rayon Food Trading Organization "soaps of different prices were being sold at the same time -- a practice forbidden by law." Candy which was supposed to be sold by weight was being sold by the piece at higher prices. Customers were also being cheated on the weights of goods. (3) Another article along the same line reports that buyers complain of harsh treatment, false weights, and shortchanging in Shop No 14 of Yaroslav' Food Trust. (2)

SOURCES

1. Leninskoye Znamya, No 230, 22 Nov 1949
2. Trud, No 270, 16 Nov 1949
3. Moskovskiy Bol'shevik, No 4, 5 Jan 1950
4. Sovetskaya Latviya, No 276, 24 Nov 1949
5. Sovetskaya Kirgiziya, 14 Oct 1949
6. Izvestiya Sovetov Deputatov Trudyashchikhsya SSR, No 278, 25 Nov 1949
7. Moskovskiy Bol'shevik, 25 Nov 1949
8. Leningradskaya Pravda, No 276, 24 Nov 1949
9. Zarya Vostoka, No 230, 24 Nov 1949

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